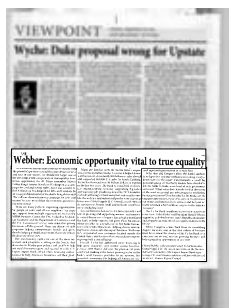




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## Webber: Economic opportunity vital to true equality

As our nation and our state continue to reckon with the powerful questions raised this year about fairness and race in our society, we should not forget one of the most important components of true equality: Economic opportunity for all. Many remember Martin Luther King's famous March on Washington as a campaign for civil and voting rights, but it was actually titled A March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. In an essay published just after his death, King elaborated "We call our demonstration a campaign for jobs and income because we feel that the economic question is the most crucial."

There are many paths to improving opportunities for people of color and all our neighbors. Six years ago, support from multiple organizations such as the MBDA Business Center, the USC-Columbia Technology Incubator and the Department of Commerce and the U.S. Commercial Service were crucial to getting businesses off the ground. There are dozens of such programs helping entrepreneurs launch and grow, thereby helping us build an economy that truly reflects the diversity of our state.

But unfortunately right now one of the most important such programs is sitting on the bench, shut down due to Washington politics and unable to help our state's businesses grow and succeed. It is the U.S. Export-Import Bank, which offers financing and insurance to help American businesses sell their products overseas.

Many are familiar with the Ex-Im Bank's importance to the overall economy. Last year it helped American businesses close nearly \$30 billion in sales abroad and supported 165,000 U.S. jobs. In South Carolina, Ex-Im has financed over \$4 billion dollars in exports in the last five years. The bank is a vital link in America's manufacturing economy, supporting big-ticket and massively job-producing items like 787 Dreamliners built at Boeing's Charleston plant and smaller ones like the wellness and nutritional products we export at Innovative Global Supply LLC. Overall, nearly 90% of its transactions benefit small and medium-sized businesses including mine.

Less well known, however is Ex-Im's especially vital role in growing and supporting women- and minority-owned businesses. Congress has actually mandated the bank to help support and grow these businesses where possible. As a result, one in five bank transactions now involve these users, helping diverse new entrepreneurs break into the export business. With over 95% of potential new customers located outside the United States, any business that can crack into exports is giving itself a crucial leg up.

Overall, Ex-Im has authorized more financing to help grow minority- and women-owned businesses since 2009 than it did over the previous 16 years combined, making it the fastest growing sector in the bank's small business portfolio. In my opinion, this powerful commitment to helping all Americans succeed represents government at its very best.

Why then did Congress allow the bank's authori-



ty to lapse this summer without even taking an up or down vote on the issue? Unfortunately, a small but powerful group of Tea Party leaders have decided to kill the bank to make some kind of anti-government statement. What sense does it make to shut down one of the most successful pro-jobs programs established by our government? Nor does the Ex-Im Bank cost the taxpayers any money; it pays the costs of its operations out of fees and interest on its services and last year actually returned a \$675 million surplus to the national Treasury!

The Ex-Im Bank reauthorization is not a partisan issue. Gov. Nikki Haley and President Barack Obama support it, as do both of our state's Republican senators and a bipartisan majority of our representatives in the House.

When Congress comes back from its monthlong August vacation, one of the first orders of business must be to renew the charter of the Ex-Im Bank so it can carry on its vital mission growing business and helping equalize opportunity in our state.

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*Cherod Webber is the president and CEO of Innovative Global Supply LLC. He served two terms on the Business Advisory Committee of the Export-Import Bank representing U.S. small-business interests and presently serves on the S.C. District Export Council.*

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## Plans underway for 2016 S.C. Manufacturing Conference and Expo

STAFF REPORT  
sarah.williams@biznews.com



**F**ollowing the success of the first S.C. Manufacturing Conference and Expo, SC Biz News has already started to plan for its second event in 2016.


The 2016 S.C. Manufacturing Conference and Expo is scheduled for April 20-21 at the TD Convention Center in Greenville. The two-day event includes an auto manufacturing luncheon, workforce development breakfast and Salute to Manufacturing Awards Luncheon.

Keynote speakers confirmed thus far include Katarina Fjording, vice president of manufacturing for the Volvo Car Group, and Marco Wirtz, president and CEO of Daimler Vans Manufacturing.

Fjording is slated to give one of the keynote speeches during the auto manufacturing luncheon at noon, April 20. According to the conference website, Fjording will update the construction of Volvo's first U.S. factory, which is located in Berkeley County, and is scheduled to produce up to 100,000 cars per year in 2018.

Wirtz will be another speaker during the luncheon on April 20. Wirtz has been with Daimler since 1988 and serves on the board of the Charleston Chamber of Commerce, steering committee for the World Trade Center and the board of directors for the S.C. Automotive Council.

The 2015 conference, held in May, featured six keynote speakers, including S.C. Gov. Nikki Haley and 33 speakers from across the United States. In addition, there were eight panel discussions, a manufacturing supplier expo, community job fair and a career fair for high school students. According to its website, the conference had more than 3,500 people in attendance over the course of the inaugural event.

For more information, visit the conference website at <http://scmanufacturing-conference.com>. 



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## Hitt says CU-ICAR prominent in state automotive recruiting

### STAFF REPORT

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**A**s S.C. officials and business leaders pitch the state to automotive prospects globally, the Clemson University International Center for Automotive Research is a “very, very important” enticement, state Commerce Secretary Bobby Hitt said.

He said the research and development campus “has become very well known,” with testing and analysis sponsored by automotive companies such as Toyota and Chrysler.

A group that included Gov. Nikki Haley and business executives from across the state has returned from an automotive mission that included visits with executives of Volvo and its suppliers in Gothenburg, Sweden, with BMW executives in Munich and the International Motor Show in Frankfurt, Germany.

Hitt, a former BMW Manufacturing Co. spokesman in Greer, said before their departure that the mission would be building on the state’s successes recruiting Volvo and Mercedes-Benz vans, both of which announced plans and are building plants in the Charleston area.

“We are building a fairly strong cluster in the state with three premium OEMs,” Hitt said, referring to original equipment manufacturers BMW, Volvo and Mercedes-Benz.

When an automotive company builds a new plant in the state, suppliers tend to follow. Hitt cited how BMW, which launched its Upstate operations in 1994, has grown to about 9,000 people who work at the plant, with suppliers employing 30,000 South Carolinians at locations in 28 of the state’s 46 counties.

“You can see that when these plants unfold they have a lot of moving parts to them,” Hitt said.

Hitt also said, of the past 10 auto manufacturer expansions to the Western Hemisphere, eight went to Mexico and two to South Carolina.

“We are the first state to break the Mexican trend, and we will continue to work hard on that,” Hitt said.

Speaking previously at BMW headquarters in Munich, Clemson University President James P. Clements said the university’s 12-year partnership with the automaker is flourishing.

“I look forward to nurturing it and watching it continue to thrive,” he said.

Clements led a Clemson group who met with Manfred Erlacher, president of BMW Manufacturing.

The university in April 2014 became one of the BMW Group’s international Strategic Partner Universities.

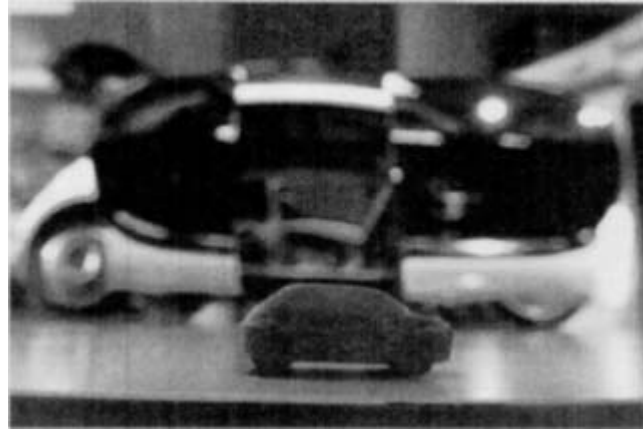
Clements committed to educating engineers and other talented graduates to help meet the automaker’s needs for years to come.

“We are planning for the next 10, 20, even 50 years, which means BMW can expect even more highly qualified Clemson graduates and cutting-edge research well into the future,” Clements said. He said CU-ICAR would not have been possible without BMW’s support as the university’s first founding industry partner for the campus. BMW’s Information Technology Research Center



was the first private-sector campus resident, he said.

Since 2009, the automotive engineering graduate program at CU-ICAR has awarded doctorate degrees and 233 Master of Science degrees, Clements said. Automotive



*Deep Orange 5, the fifth-generation concept vehicle designed and built by students at the Clemson University International Center for Automotive Research. (Photo/Provided)*

companies spent \$6 million on research in 2014 at CU-ICAR, he said.

“Over the last nine years, Clemson has done more than 100 successful projects in collaboration with BMW, and you have hired 150 Clemson graduates,” Clements said.

Clements also pledged to continue working with BMW on research that will help the company improve products and processes.

The Deep Orange program is an example of how Clemson works with industry partners to translate research into new technology, he said. That program has automotive engineering students work with automakers to design and build new concept cars. BMW has sponsored two Deep Orange cars and is sponsor of Deep Orange 7, which has students working to reinvent the BMW Mini. <sup>(85)</sup>

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### **148 Letters to the Editor Does Haley hate white men?**

Nikki Haley's a racist. I voted for her. I regret it.  
She seems to hate white men. If she thinks this  
country is so bad, why is almost every store run by  
Indians? I am a white male and proud. She needs to  
go to India and be happy.

I got American Indian in me.

She is not Republican. She took down the Confed-  
erate flag, our battle flag.

**MITCHELL SIMS**  
Timmonsville



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## SC ranked worst for domestic violence

The Associated Press

COLUMBIA — South Carolina has again ranked worst in the nation for deadly violence against women, according to a re-

port released Tuesday by the Violence Policy Center.

Ranking first among states for women murdered by men, South Carolina

had a rate of 2.32 women killed per 100,000 people in 2013.

That's more than twice the national average and represents 57 known deaths, compared with 50 a year earlier, according to the study.

South Carolina ranked second last year and has been in the report's top

10 annually for the last 18 years. This is the fourth time that the state ranked worst in the nation.

The study found that nationwide, 94 percent of women killed by men were murdered by someone they knew, and the most common weapon used was a gun.

Domestic violence and

gun ownership were widely discussed this past session in the South Carolina Legislature, which ultimately approved a bill aimed at stemming the state's persistently high rate. The bill signed into law by Gov. Nikki Haley both increases penalties and gives prosecutors more options for punishment.

Charges will now be based on a combination of the severity of the abuse and the number of offenses and circumstances surrounding the crime. The

law also bans some batterers from having guns. In a statement, Kristen Rand of the Violence Policy Center commended states including South Carolina for tackling the issue but said more improvement is clearly needed.

"Yet in the face of these alarming statistics, more needs to be done at the federal and state levels to protect women from abuse and prevent future tragedies," Rand said.

See **VIOLENCE**, Page 4A

## Violence

From Page 1A

Haley's task force, which has been meeting all year on domestic violence, issued dozens of recommendations last month, including training more 911 operators, improving documentation of the crime scene and increasing the number of shelters statewide.

Other recommendations include making paperwork for victims easier to fill out

and more uniform and increasing the availability of emergency shelters.

The report comes just ahead of Domestic Violence Awareness Month in October. The study uses the latest data available from the FBI for crimes involving one male killing one female.

In a statement, South Carolina's top prosecutor said the legislation has helped the state make progress but that more advances are needed.

"With these reforms,

front-line law enforcement and prosecutors now have much-needed new tools to better combat this crime," Attorney General Alan Wilson said. "As I said at the time, passing one piece of legislation alone will not end this problem, but it is a significant step in the right direction."

Each October, the attorney general's office memorializes the known victims killed in domestic abuse. The 18th annual Silent Witness ceremony is scheduled for Oct. 6.



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# 148 Around and around an insightful political roundtable

The coffee is flowing and so are the opinions around and around a round table at the back of the main dining room in Victor's in downtown Florence. It's Friday morning, and this is the "Political Roundtable," the last hour of "Good Morning Pee Dee" on WFRK (95.3 FM).

Let's pull up a chair and listen in.

"Trump is a piece of work," says Neal Thigpen, a regular guest, a former chairman of the Francis Marion University Political Science Department and the "Godfather of Pee Dee politics," host Ken Ard says.

Ard chimes in.

"Despite him being the most unusual candidate we've seen coming down the pike in a long time, he dominates the debate," Ard says. "The Republican Party is talking about issues that Donald Trump says they need to talk about."

Local attorney Rod Jernigan and Morning News reporter Gavin Jackson are other regulars on this panel, but they aren't here on this day. FMU history professor Scott Kaufman is here. Ard's show has aired for the past three years from 7 to 9 a.m. on weekdays. The roundtable assembles at 8 a.m. each Friday.

Thigpen believes Trump has disposed of all competitors except Dr. Ben Carson and Carly Fiorina.

"The nonpoliticians," Ard says.

"Right now, Trump has all the cards," Kaufman says.

The political climate has changed.

"There's a strain of populism in the Republican Party today that has not been properly accounted for," Ard says. "There is such disdain with the political class, with the aristocratic version of Republican politics, with the 'it's my turn' way Republicans have done business for a long time. If it weren't Donald Trump, it'd be somebody else. Trump is a showman. Politics has become this big theatrical production. ... He's by far the best showman in the game."

Thigpen says the new Republican Party is "not made up of

the elites ... career state bosses. ... It's a middle- and lower-middle-class white vote. These are the people that now are the establishment in the Republican Party." Trump, Carson and Fiorina "are the kind of people that they want in office ... because things are changing so fast. Gay marriage. A black guy getting president. This is all troubling."

Ard's insight is keen.

"This is not an election on policy," he says. "This is an attitude election."

This is a taste of the interesting weekly dialogue. For months, the buzz was background noise, but now that we are past Labor Day, it's time to tune in. Democratic Party contender Bernie Sanders appeared Saturday in Florence. The second GOP debate will come Wednesday. The Iowa caucus is 141 days away. The New Hampshire primary is eight days later. The South Carolina primary follows on Feb. 20.

The discussion about Trump and the new GOP continues.

"I'll be honest, I think there's beauty in it," Ard says. "I don't know where the campaign ends up. I don't know if I can vote for him or not, but I do believe it's healthy for the system for a guy to come along who is so unique and different that we struggle to understand how to deal with him. ... He's a disrupter."

Hillary Clinton is not a disrupter, Ard says. He cites a recent Bloomberg poll of 150 Democratic activists.

"The word they came up that best described Mrs. Clinton was 'credentialed,'" Ard says. "The next question was, 'Give me an accomplishment.' And the phone went silent."

Thigpen calls Clinton "stiff." Ard says she is "a political animal."

"She's not a good political candidate," he says. "Her husband was a generational sort of political candidate. Her husband was Reagan-like. Different ideologies, but they had the ability to connect to average people. She struggles day after day after day."

Later Ard cites a poll that says 80 percent of S.C. Republican

voters wish U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham of South Carolina would drop out of the race.

Thigpen says Graham would be considered "yellow" if he drops out before the S.C. primary.

"It would be really embarrassing to lose South Carolina to Donald Trump if you are a sitting United States senator," Ard says.

After the show, both Ard and Thigpen say S.C. Gov. Nikki Haley would challenge Graham for his Senate seat if he is trounced in the primary.

Ard has the perspective of a player. He is a former Florence County councilman who beat tea-party candidates in the 2010 lieutenant governor's race. He resigned in March 2012 after pleading guilty to seven counts of violating state ethics law stemming from the handling of campaign funds.

After Friday's show, Ard recalls a conversation he had with David Wilkins, the former S.C. speaker of the House and U.S. ambassador to Canada. This was when Ard was considering his run for lieutenant governor.

"He said, 'Tell me a little about yourself,'" Ard says. "I said, 'Well, I ran a business, I balanced a budget, I made a payroll, I dealt with real problems every day of my life. Some of them I figured out; some of them I couldn't. I beat some of them, and some of them beat me.'"

"And then I said, 'Then I got on county council,' and Wilkins said, 'Stop! I wouldn't say another word. Ken, politics is yearning for that. Politics doesn't need all that sophisticated "where do you stand on this policy?" We've had enough of that.' This was four years ago. He said, 'The American people are about to figure that out.'"

Ard admits that much of his interest in Trump is personal.

"I feel like the system whipped me," Ard says, "and I feel like he's trying to whip the system."

This is good stuff. Tune in next week for more.

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***Don Kausler Jr.***  
Editor

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# 148 Revenue Department stepping up its debt-collection efforts

The Associated Press

**COLUMBIA** — Debtors beware: The Department of Revenue is making it easier for state agencies to collect the fines and fees they're owed.

An initiative announced Thursday with the state Ethics Commission is part of Revenue's overall improvements to its two debt-collection programs, available to all agencies and local governments. The ethics enforcement agency, already enrolled in both, was eager to take advantage of the upgrades, said Revenue spokeswoman Ashley Thomas.

"The department will use all available methods to hold ethics violators responsible for unpaid debts," said Revenue Director Rick Reames. The joint effort "makes government more accountable to the public."

The Ethics Commission's latest debtors' list shows officeholders, former candidates and lobbyists owe more than \$3 million on fines and penalties levied since 1999.

Much of that stems from late filings of campaign disclosure reports. Many people on the list are either still going through an appeals process or are working with the agency on a payment plan, said Ethics Commission Director Herb Hayden.

"If we can collect, we'd

rather continue our own efforts. But those debts that are obviously bad debts that we've exhausted our efforts to collect will be sent to them," since Revenue has greater authority, he said.

In the "setoff debt" program, Revenue siphons money from income tax refunds the debtor would otherwise get. The other program is more extensive, with recovery methods that

include garnishing people's wages and seizing money from bank accounts.

Participating agencies had been able to send Revenue a list for collection just once a year. That's increased to three times annually for "setoff debt" enrollees and at any time for collections through the other program.

"Once we determine a bad debt, we'll be able to send it over," rather than waiting until December, Hayden said.

In January, Gov. Nikki Haley directed her Cabinet agencies to enroll in both programs, if they hadn't already. Her directive came after state Inspector General Patrick Maley released a report showing 44 agencies and colleges were potentially owed more than \$1 billion in unpaid fees, fines, taxes and tuition. He cautioned, however, that the tally was flawed, due to agencies' different report-

ing methods.

Maley recommended then that Revenue better market both programs and lower its fees for collecting through the more intensive GEAR (Government En-

terprise Accounts Receivable). Its 28.5 percent collection fee, deducted from the owed amount, helps explain why it's not used, he said.

Revenue has reduced that fee to 22 percent.

The flat, per-collection fee for money recovered through "setoff debt" remains unchanged at \$25, charged to the debtor.

Other improvements include four additional employees dedicated to collection efforts and a streamlined enrollment process. Agencies can now enroll in both programs using the same application. Revenue is working to hire two additional collectors, which would bring the total to 18, Thomas said.

Revenue officials are in the process of meeting with officials to promote the changes, she said.

According to the agency, it recovered \$136 million through "setoff debt" collections and \$20 million through the broader program last year. That compares to \$144 million and \$17 million, respectively, in the first eight months of 2015.

## Pee Dee politicians, ranked by ethics debt

### 1. \$106,978

Councilman Ed Robinson  
Candidate for Florence City  
Council/mayor, 2009, 2012,  
2014; 2015

### 2. \$70,000

Leval Williams  
Candidate for Florence

### 6. \$15,100

Michael A. Irvin  
Candidate for Chesterfield  
County sheriff, 2014

### 7. \$15,000

Charles Spring  
Society Hill Town Council,  
2014

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|                               |                            |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------|
| County treasurer, 2014        | <b>8. \$14,063</b>         |
| <b>3. \$35,853</b>            | Joe P. Whitaker            |
| Simon L. Brown                | Candidate for Florence     |
| Candidate for Williamsburg    | County School District 4   |
| County sheriff, 2009          | and Timmonsville Town      |
| <b>4. \$23,700</b>            | Council, 2014              |
| Robert M. Stokes, Bishopville | <b>9. \$13,429</b>         |
| Commissioner Lee County       | Clarence Joe, Timmonsville |
| Election Commission, 2006     | Candidate for Timmonsville |
| <b>5. \$20,000</b>            | Town Council, 2006         |
| Jeremiah Bryant               | <b>10. \$8,000</b>         |
| Candidate for Williamsburg    | E.J. Melvin, Bishopville   |
| County Council, 2015          | Lee County sheriff, 2009   |

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**Bid to shut Guantanamo roils Pentagon, White House, Congress**

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Obama administration's struggling quest to close the U.S. detention center at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, is mired in state and federal politics. Frustrated White House and Pentagon officials are blaming each other for the slow progress releasing approved detainees and finding a new prison to house those still held.

Defense Secretary Ash Carter is facing criticism from some administration officials who complain that he has not approved enough transfers, even though 52 Guantanamo detainees are eligible. Carter's predecessor, Chuck Hagel, was forced from the Pentagon job in part because the White House felt he was not moving quickly enough to send detainees to other countries.

Two officials said the White House is frustrated because President Barack Obama discussed the issue with Carter when he was hired this year to lead the Defense Department, and they believed Carter was on board with the White House's plans to act faster.

Other U.S. officials note that Carter has approved some transfers and is pushing his staff to move quickly to get more to his desk. But many other proposed transfers are slogging through the bureaucracy, under review by a long list of defense, military, intelligence and other administration offices. The transfers cannot be approved unless officials believe the detainees will not return to terrorism or the battlefield

upon release and that there is a host country willing to take them.

During his two years as Pentagon chief, Hagel approved 44 detainee transfers. Carter, in his first seven months, has transferred six.

Obama has promised to close the facility since he was a presidential candidate in 2008. He said it ran counter to American values to keep people in prison, many without criminal charges or due process.

Opponents have argued the detainees are essentially prisoners of war.

From a peak of 680 prisoners, 116 remain. Finding acceptable places for them has been an intractable problem.

A key player in the process is Gen. Martin Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Dempsey, who spent more than three years as a commander in Iraq, continues to be very cautious in his recommendations for transfers. His opinions carry a lot of weight.

The movement of detainees is only part of the challenge. A greater hurdle will be finding a U.S.-based prison to house the 64 detainees considered too dangerous to be sent to another country. Congress has opposed any effort to bring detainees to America, so Obama's long-stated goal of closing Guantanamo before he leaves office in January 2017 is more likely to die on the steps of Capitol Hill.

Three to five civilian facilities are being eyed as potential sites, officials said. A Pentagon team has

gone to military facilities in South Carolina and Kansas to develop better estimates of construction and other changes that would be needed to house the detainees as well as conduct military commission trials for those accused of war crimes.

The visits to the Navy Consolidated Brig in Charleston, South Carolina, and the United States Disciplinary Barracks at Fort Leavenworth in Kansas triggered immediate outrage from lawmakers and governors there.

Republican Govs. Nikki Haley of South Carolina and Sam Brownback of Kansas have threatened to sue the administration if detainees are brought to either state.

Both the House and Senate have pending legislation that would maintain prohibitions on transferring detainees to U.S. facilities. The Senate legislation allows the restrictions to be lifted if the White House submits a plan to close the facility and it's approved by Congress.

GOP Sen. John McCain of Arizona, chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, has made it known he would consider a comprehensive plan to close Guantanamo, but said it must include answers to a number of tough legal and policy questions, including whether detainees held in the U.S. would have additional rights.

Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., has opposed using the Charleston brig because it is in a populated area.





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THE ASSOCIATED PRESS FILE

**The entrance to Camp 5 and Camp 6 at the U.S. military's Guantanamo Bay detention center at Guantanamo Bay Naval Base, Cuba.**

Title: **Services today for fallen firefighter**  
 Author: By STEPHEN FASTENAU [sfastenau@beaufortgazette.com](mailto:sfastenau@beaufortgazette.com) • 843-706-8182  
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# Services today for fallen firefighter

Stuart Hardy died Sept. 24 after suffering a medical event on a truck responding to a call Sept. 13

By **STEPHEN FASTENAU**

[sfastenau@beaufortgazette.com](mailto:sfastenau@beaufortgazette.com) • 843-706-8182

Several stories have drifted Harry Rountree's way during the past couple weeks as Burton Fire District remembered one of its own. Some stories Rountree thinks he probably should not have heard as Burton's fire chief, he said jokingly Wednesday. But the tales shed light on the personality and sense of humor of firefighter Stuart Hardy, who died last week and will be remembered today before he is buried in Beaufort National Cemetery.

**Please see SERVICES on 11A**

## SERVICES

**Continued from 1A**

"Stuart was extremely likable," Rountree said at the district's station on Burton Hill Road.

Funeral services for Hardy are open to the public and will be held 11 a.m. at Praise Assembly of God on Parris Island Gateway. Hardy will be buried in Beaufort National Cemetery with military and emergency services honors.

A procession will follow the funeral and is expected to include numerous fire and emergency personnel. The route to Beaufort National Cemetery will go down Parris Island Gateway and right

onto Robert Smalls to Highway 21. A ladder truck will display a flag over the route on Robert Smalls near its intersection with 21.

Hardy died Sept. 24 after suffering a medical event on a truck responding to a call Sept. 13. Results of a medical autopsy and a cause of death are not yet available, Rountree said.

Gov. Nikki Haley has ordered that flags be flown at half-staff today in Hardy's memory.

Hardy's fellow firefighters have noted his sense of humor but also a fierce dedication to the job.

Firefighter Rafael Nepaulsingh was hired by the district

the same time as Hardy. The men attended the S.C. Fire Academy at the same time and trained together.

Nepaulsingh said they were among about 15 or 20 guys competing for a job at the Burton department.

The work included a written exam, physical fitness test and exercises wearing a weighted vests, dragging weighted dummies and raising ladders.

"He was the man to beat," Nepaulsingh said. "You could just tell he was a step above everyone else."

Follow reporter Stephen Fastenau at [twitter.com/IPBG\\_Stephen](https://twitter.com/IPBG_Stephen).

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Author: By STEPHEN FASTENAU sfastenau@beaufortgazette.com • 843-706-8182

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### **FUNERAL SERVICES FOR STUART HARDY**

- **WHAT:** Funeral services, procession and burial for Burton firefighter Stuart Hardy
- **WHEN:** 11 a.m. today. Motorists should expect road closures and traffic delays during the processional, which is expected to begin about noon today.
- **WHERE:** Funeral at Praise Assembly of God, Parris Island Gateway; Burial in Beaufort National Cemetery
- **VIDEO:** Praise Assembly will offer live streaming of the service on its website at [praiseassembly.churchonline.org](http://praiseassembly.churchonline.org) and its Android app found by searching "Praise AG."



#### **MORE ONLINE**

For video of Burton Fire District firefighters talking about Stuart Hardy, click on this story at [beaufortgazette.com](http://beaufortgazette.com).



**JOSH MITELMAN** • Staff photo

**Burton Fire District Chief Harry Rountree is interviewed Wednesday at Burton Fire Department Headquarters. Rountree and others offered stories to remember fellow firefighter Stuart Hardy.**



Title: **Services today for fallen firefighter**

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JOSH MITELMAN • Staff photo

**Lt. John Ireland, a firefighter with the Burton Fire District, is interviewed by local media on Wednesday afternoon at Burton Fire Department Headquarters as Dan Byrne, public information officer with the district, looks on. Ireland and others offered stories to remember fellow firefighter Stuart Hardy, who died last week after suffering a medical event.**

Title: **S.C. plans changes to protect foster kids**  
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# S.C. plans changes to protect foster kids

## Class-action suit brings agreement

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Gov. Nikki Haley and the state Department of Social Services director have agreed to examine South Carolina's approach to housing foster children and adopt workload limits for caseworkers in response to a class-action lawsuit that alleges "dangerous deficiencies" in the system.

U.S. District Judge Richard Gergel on Monday signed an interim consent agreement that will launch changes aimed at better protecting foster children in DSS care. It does not end the lawsuit.

Full settlement talks continue to address an array of critical shortcomings

outlined in the federal lawsuit, said Christina Remlin, senior staff attorney for Children's Rights, one of the advocacy groups that filed the civil rights lawsuit in Charleston nine months ago.

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# S.C. changes to help protect foster kids

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"This is a fundamental first step in reforming the system to make it more safe for vulnerable children in South Carolina," Remlin said. "This should have a really big impact."

The lawsuit was filed on behalf of 11 children the advocacy groups say were abused, overmedicated with powerful prescriptions, separated from their siblings, kept in solitary confinement and fed moldy or expired food, according to court documents.

The lawsuit also contends the Department of Social Services has failed to maintain an adequate number of foster homes for children in the system, that DSS caseworkers have been assigned too many cases to manage and that children enrolled

in foster care have not been receiving the basic health care that they need.

Haley, DSS Chief Susan Alford and attorneys for the children agreed to the following changes:

- DSS will conduct a study to determine how many children agency caseworkers can handle and adopt workload limits for those workers. The agency agreed to consider national standards in adopting those limits, which will apply to all workers and supervisors. The agreement doesn't address how the agency would pay for additional caseworkers.

- Within 60 days, DSS will come up with a plan to phase out placing children ages 6 and under in non-family group homes and treatment centers. DSS also will phase out the use of hotels, motels and DSS offices for housing

ing foster children overnight.

- DSS will no longer recommend that children remain in juvenile detention simply because workers can't find foster care placement for them.

A DSS spokeswoman said that Alford has been working to strengthen the child welfare system since she came into her post.

The director has hired 177 more case workers and 67 caseworker assistants, aggressively recruited for those positions, increased caseworkers' salaries, restructured the child welfare division, streamlined the foster home licensing process and improved the support structure for existing foster homes, DSS spokeswoman Marilyn Matheus said.

"DSS anticipates that the agreed-upon provisions of the

interim relief agreement will continue this forward momentum, and DSS is hopeful that it can continue to work towards a full resolution of the lawsuit," Matheus said in a statement.

Earlier this year, The Post and Courier documented a number of problems with the state's foster care system in its series "Warehousing our Children." The series cited federal data that shows South Carolina sends its youngest foster children into group homes and institutions at a much higher rate than any other state in the country. Firsthand accounts from former foster children and group home employees indicate some young people are neglected, beaten and molested in these facilities even as the outcomes of investigations into such allegations are kept secret.

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Meanwhile, state taxpayers spend millions of dollars a year on these facilities but have no way to evaluate which ones keep children safe because state laws shield the homes from public scrutiny.

The federal lawsuit contains a number of disturbing stories alleging ill treatment of foster children. Among them:

A girl named "Michelle H." was repeatedly beaten with a belt by her foster mother in Beaufort. "Ava," who was placed in the Jenkins Facility in Charleston, was deprived of food and feminine hygiene products. Also, "a maintenance worker asked Ava to take nude pictures of herself and provide them to him. Ava reported this

to Jenkins staff but no action was taken."

A 13-year-old named "Sammy V." was inappropriately touched by another resident after he was placed at New Beginnings of Charleston, two hours away from his biological family.

"Andrew R." received no mental health evaluation at Epworth Children's Home in Richland County, but was placed on "a powerful psychotropic medication for the first time in his life. The medication is commonly prescribed to treat bipolar disorder; yet Andrew had never been (and has never been) diagnosed with bipolar disorder."

According to federal data cited in the lawsuit, more than

3,000 children are enrolled in the state's foster care system.

"We are talking about some of the most vulnerable children in the entire state," Remlin said. "This (interim agreement) gets the ball rolling on some real fundamental needs."

The lawsuit was filed by Children's Rights, the South Carolina Appleseed Legal Justice Center and attorney Matthew T. Richardson.

Although critical issues remain unaddressed in Monday's agreement, including an alleged lack of medical assessments and treatment for foster children, Remlin applauded DSS for taking a meaningful first step.

"I'm tremendously optimistic we will be able to reach agree-

ment on this," Remlin said.

**"This is a fundamental first step in reforming the system to make it more safe for vulnerable children in South Carolina. This should have a really big impact."**

**Christina Remlin**, senior staff attorney for Children's Rights,